

Introduction to Esther

The form of a short story, like those of Ruth and Jonah. Depicts the plight of Jews who remained in exile after the return of the remnant to Judah.

Josephus attributes the authorship to Mordecai (*Antiquities* 11:6:1)

Author was familiar with Persian customs, words, and layout of the palace and the court (which was destroyed by fire 30 years after Xerxes' death).

The book tells of God's protection of the diaspora from an intended holocaust, and the origins of the Feast of Purim, still celebrated by Jews.

Shushan = Susa 200 miles east of Babylon, the winter residence of Persian kings

Ahasuerus = Xerxes (ruled Persia 485-465)

The feast (ch.1) held in anticipation of Xerxes' expedition against Greece (battles of Thermopylae and Salamis (480 BC).

Vashti deposed prior to expedition, Esther chosen afterward (478 BC).

Esther saves the Diaspora from annihilation (473)

40 years after temple (Zerubbabel), 30 years before Nehemiah's wall

Xerxes died 13 years after marrying Esther. She may have outlived him by many years, and may have influenced Artaxerxes (her stepson) in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Written as a secular story: the studied avoidance of mentioning God or religion:

- Mordecai, as a Jew, won't bow to Haman, but no mention why (3:4)
- A divine purpose in Esther's position, but no mention of God (4:14)
- Fasting, but no praying mentioned (4:16)
- The Jews' victory described without attributing to God (ch.9)

Enormous coincidences demonstrate divine providence throughout the story (4:14):

- Vashti's banishment and Esther's selection as queen (2:9, 17)
- Mordecai's overhearing of the plot against the king (2:21-22)
- The recording (and unrewarding) of Mordecai's saving the king (2:23)
- The king's insomnia (6:1)
- The specific passage selected from the chronicles (6:2)
- The timing of Haman's arrival (6:4)

Mordecai's greatness (along with Esther's) is comparable with that of Joseph, in Egypt, and of Daniel, in Babylon and Persia (8:2). Though dispersed among the Gentiles, the Jews often possess positions of influence politically, culturally, and financially.

Lessons::

Haman's pride destroys him;

Mordecai's civil disobedience is rewarded;

Esther's submission ("If it please the king..." 5X) and courage;

God still looking out for His people in a pagan land;

God's providence in earthly affairs, even when unacknowledged

Outline:

I. The rise of Esther

- A. Vashti is deposed (ch.1)
- B. Esther is selected (ch.2:1-18)

II. The crisis with Haman

- A. Mordecai reveals the ploy against the king (2:19-23)
- B. Haman resents and conspires against the Jews (ch.3)
- C. Mordecai informs Esther of the plot (ch.4)
- D. Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet (5:1-8)
- E. Haman constructs a gallows to kill Mordecai (5:9-14)
- F. The king belatedly honors Mordecai (ch.6)
- G. Esther's feast and Haman's downfall (ch.7)

III. Israel's deliverance

- A. Mordecai advanced; he and Esther intercede for Jews (ch.8)
- B. The Jews successfully defend themselves (9:1-17)
- C. The Feast of Purim instituted (9:18-32)
- D. Mordecai's high position (ch.10)

Possible Typology?

Xerxes, like God—sovereign

Vashti, like Israel—the rebellious wife

Haman like Satan—opposing God's people

Esther like the church—interceding

Mordecai like the Messiah—exalted (8:2; 10:3)

Mordecai's decree like the Gospel—causing rejoicing (8:15-17)